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# TARRANT COUNTY
## ELECTIONS ADMINISTRATION

20 Apr 2021

## CENTRAL COUNT STATION PLAN

**A.      PURPOSE:**

Section 127.007 of the Texas Election Code requires the *Manager* of the central counting station ("CCS") to "establish and implement a written plan for the orderly operation of the central counting station."  this plan be made available to the public on request not later than 5 p.m. on the fifth day before the date of the election.

Section 127.007(b) provides that a CCS plan "must address the process for comparing the number of voters who signed the combination form with the number of votes cast for an entire election."

**B.      LOCATION:**

The Tarrant County Central Counting Station will be located at Tarrant County Elections Administration, 2700 Premier St, Fort Worth, TX 76111.

**C.      CENTRAL COUNTING STATION PERSONNEL:**

The following are the roles and responsibilities inside the Central Counting Station, as contained in Sections 127.002-127.006 of the Texas Election Code:

- The Elections Administrator will serve as the *Central Counting Station Manager* to manage the overall administration of the station and supervision of personnel.

- The Technology Resources Coordinator will serve as the *Tabulation Supervisor* to operate automatic tabulating equipment.

- The Voting Systems Analyst will serve as *Assistant Tabulation Supervisor* to assist the Tabulation Supervisor.

- The *Presiding Judge* of the Early Voting Ballot Board will serve as the *Presiding Judge* to maintain order at the Central Counting Station, administer oaths, and receive ballots to be counted.

- The *Alternate Presiding Judge* of the Early Voting Ballot Board will serve as the *Alternate Judge* at the Central Counting Station to serve in the capacity of the Presiding Judge in the event that the Presiding Judge is not present or available.

  *Note:*  The *Presiding Judge* is entitled to compensation at the same rate as a precinct *Presiding Judge*, except that the counting station judge is entitled to a minimum compensation of five hours' pay regardless of the amount of time worked. (127.005 d)

- *Central Counting Station Clerks* may be appointed as needed by the Central Counting Station *Manager* and the *Presiding Judge* as outlined Section 127.006 of the Election Code.

  *Note:* To be eligible to serve as a clerk a person must be a qualified voter of the county in which the central counting station is located. The general custodian of election records, an employee of the custodian, or any other employee of a political subdivision is not ineligible to serve as a clerk under this section because the person is a qualified voter of a county other than the county in which the central counting station is located or because of the custodian's status as a candidate or officeholder. (127.006 b)

  A clerk appointed by the *Manager* serves under the *Manager* and shall perform the functions directed by the *Manager*. A clerk appointed by the *Presiding Judge* serves under the *Presiding Judge* and shall perform the functions directed by the *Presiding Judge.* (127.006 c)

  A clerk is entitled to compensation at the same rate as a precinct election clerk, except that a clerk who serves for the entire time a counting station is in operation is entitled to a minimum compensation of three hours' pay regardless of the amount of time worked. (127.006 d)

## D. PROCEDURES FOR CONVENING THE CENTRAL COUNTING STATION:
Section 87.0241 of the Texas Election Code dictates when an entity is permitted to count ballots.

The Central Counting Station will convene based on the size and type of election as determined by the *Central Counting Station Manager* and the *Presiding Judge* to count early voting ballots and provisional or late ballots as may be required.

The Central Counting Station may not begin the process to count early voting ballots until:
(1) the polls open on election day; or
(2) in an election conducted by an authority of a county with a population of 100,000 or more or conducted jointly with such a county, the end of the period for early voting by personal appearance.

## E. ADMINISTRATION OF OATHS:
Section 127.0015 of the Texas Election Code prescribes a required oath for all CCS personnel. The administration of oaths must take place prior to those individuals commencing any of their duties at the central counting station.

This oath should be administered verbally to all members of the early voting ballot board and all personnel at the central counting station prior to the performance of any duties by the board or the central counting station.

For use in Primary Elections, General Elections for State and County Officers and Elections ordered by the Governor:

"I swear (or affirm) that I will objectively work to be sure every eligible voter's vote is accepted and counted, and that only the ballots of those voters who violated the Texas Election Code will be rejected. I will make every effort to correctly reflect the voter's intent when it can be clearly determined. I will not work alone when ballots are present and will work only in the presence of a member of a political party different from my own. I will faithfully perform my duty as an officer of the election and guard the purity of the election."

<u>For use in all Other Elections that do not contain Party Affiliation:</u>

"I swear (or affirm) that I will objectively work to be sure every eligible voter's vote is accepted and counted, and that only the ballots of those voters who violated the Texas Election Code will be rejected. I will make every effort to correctly reflect the voter's intent when it can be clearly determined. I will not work alone when ballots are present. I will faithfully perform my duty as an officer of the election and guard the purity of the election."

F.　　**INTAKE OF BALLOTS, ELECTRONIC MEDIA AND SUPPLIES:**

Sections 129.051 and 129.052 of the Texas Election Code require the general custodian of election records to develop certain procedures related to inventory control and chain of custody of voting system equipment and electronic media associated with this equipment, providing for verification of equipment identifiers, verification of seals, and verification of chain of custody.

1. Election Judge, or their designee, brings paper ballots (in ballot transfer bags) and V-Drives (in Verity Scan) to a Tarrant County Elections Administration Rally Site – typically the site closest to their location.
2. Intake personnel will verify location tags and verify the seals on the equipment are the same as the seal numbers on the Official Register of Seals.
3. Tarrant County Elections Staff place the "original" V-drive in a security bag for transport to the Tally Room.
4. Tarrant County Elections Staff will use the Hart Verity Transmit to transmit the UNOFFICIAL results, using the "duplicate" V-drive, to the CCS.
5. The V-Drive security bags will be delivered to Tarrant County Elections, where either the *Presiding Judge* or Tarrant County Elections Staff will verify the seal numbers with the Register of Seals.  Transport may be done using Law Enforcement personnel or Tarrant County Elections Staff as provided for by Section 85.071 of the Texas Election Code.
6. The *Tabulation Supervisor* or *Assistant Tabulation Supervisor* will read all "original" V-drives into the tabulation computer to tally the totals.
7. As the media is loaded into a central accumulator, the *Presiding Judge, Central Counting Station Manager* or designee shall verify that the vote totals on the electronic media match the vote totals on the printed results tape.
8. After uploading all precinct results to the central accumulator system, the election official must verify and document that the central accumulator's total number of votes cast in an election matches the number of signatures on the combination form. If there is a discrepancy, the presiding judge of the counting station in conjunction with the central counting station manager shall determine if a further audit is necessary.

G.　　**DUPLICATION OF BALLOTS:**

Certain ballots that are counted with automatic tabulating equipment may have to be duplicated if the ballot is damaged or cannot be read with the equipment.

1. The *Presiding Judge*, with any assistants they deem necessary, will duplicate any damaged ballots in accordance with Section 127.126 of the Texas Election Code.
2. All duplication of ballots will be conducted with at least two members of differing political parties.

H.　　**RESOLVING VOTER INTENT:**

At the direction of the *Presiding Judge*, EVBB members will resolve any voter intent questions on the ballots as they are duplicated or manually counted, as applicable.

1. Ballots that are not damaged will be resolved in the Central Count System upon successfully capturing the image of the ballot.
2. Ballots that are damaged and cannot be scanned by the Central Count System will be duplicated. Prior to duplicating the ballot, the *Presiding Judge*, or an appointed ballot board team with members from different parties, will determine the manner in which the voter intent was deciphered.

## I.     TABULATION PROCEDURES:

1. The Verity Count system will be used to produce zero reports to illustrate that no pre-existing votes exist on the official database.
2. The *Presiding Judge* will break the seal on the ballot transfer bag.
3. The *Tabulation Supervisor* or *Assistant Tabulation Supervisor* will scan all un-scanned ballots into Verity Central in batches relative to quantity and type (Early Voting, Absentee, Election Day) as appropriate.
4. All scanned ballots will be reviewed by the software which will identify any that need human review (under-votes, over-votes, damaged, etc).
5. The V-drive(s) will then be read into Verity Count for addition to the database.
6. The *Tabulation Supervisor* will confirm that the number of V-drives read into the system is accurate.
7. On Election Day, Early Voting ballots, including absentees received up that point, may be tabulated, but in no case will results be released prior to 7:00PM.

## J.     RECONCILIATION:

The process for comparing the number of voters listed as having voted and the number of ballots cast is done in three ways:

1. **Early Voting in Person** – Compare the number of early voting check-ins from the ePollbooks, minus any ballots-thrown-out (e.g. spoiled), to the number of ballots cast.
2. **Early Voting By Mail** – Compare the number of ballots entered on the "Ballot Transmittal Form" from the early voting ballot board to the number of ballots counted. (87.021, 87.1221)
3. **Election Day** – Compare the number of voters on the ePollbooks, plus the Omissions List entries, minus any ballots-thrown-out (e.g. spoiled), to the total number of ballots cast. (127.007(b))

## K.     PRINTING OF PRECINCT RETURNS AND ELECTION TOTALS:

Under Section 127.127, the *Tabulation Supervisor* and the *Assistant Tabulation Supervisor* are the only ones authorized to operate the automatic tabulating equipment or handle ballots that are automatically counted.  After the counting of ballots (or accumulation of vote totals) has occurred, the *Tabulation Supervisor and Assistant Tabulation Supervisor* of the CCS are responsible for preparing the precinct election returns.  The *Presiding Judge* is required to sign the precinct returns to certify their accuracy.

The printed "precinct by precinct" report that has been adjusted to include any hand-counted ballots (if necessary) constitutes the certified precinct returns. (Section 127.131(e). Texas Election Code).

The unofficial election results shall be released as soon as available after the polls close.

Unofficial election results will be released via Tarrant County's Election Night Results webpage, beginning no earlier than 7:00PM.  Election Day results will be released incrementally as processed through acceptance and tabulation until all results are in. (Section 121.1311, Texas Election Code).

**L.     REPORTING RESULTS TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE (if applicable):**
For certain elections, including primary elections, the general election for state and county officers, and constitutional amendment elections, the SOS is required to tabulate the unofficial results statewide.  (68.001, Texas Election Code).  This information can be reported to the SOS through their online portal or via telephone.

1.  The Assistant *Tabulation Supervisor* will prepare reports with the requested totals for the Secretary of State.
2.  *Tarrant County Elections Staff* will report the totals to the Secretary of State using the SOS online portal (TEAM) or via telephone as appropriate.

**M.     POLL WATCHERS:**
Poll watchers are entitled to be present during the time the CCS has convened for the "purpose of processing or preparing to process election results and until the election officers complete their duties at the station." (Section 33.055, Texas Election Code).

A watcher may not leave during voting hours on election day without the presiding judge's permission if the counting of ballots at the central counting station has begun. (Section 33.055(b), Texas Election Code).

The poll watcher must deliver their certificate of appointment to the *Presiding Judge* of the CCS and the *Presiding Judge* must countersign their certificate.

Poll watcher(s) are permitted to stand or sit to observe the counting activities.  The *Presiding Judge* may dictate where the poll watcher(s) may stand and/or sit in order to prevent interference with the duties of the Central Counting Station personnel while still being able to observe all activities.

All activities of poll watcher(s) shall comply with Sections 33.055, 33.056, 33.060 and the current *Poll Watchers Guide* issued by the Secretary of State.

**N.     DELIVERY OF MATERIALS TO THE GENERAL CUSTODIAN OF ELECTION RECORDS:**
After the completion of the counting of ballots both on election day and after election day, if necessary, voted ballots, electronic media, election records, and election equipment will be retained by this office, who is the general custodian of election records, through the appropriate retention period in order to allow for the review of serial numbers as required.